

The Alaskan Way Viaduct & Seawall Replacement Project

07.05



A Comparison of the Alaskan Way Viaduct and San Francisco Embarcadero Freeway

Questions or comments?

Call:
(206) 269-4421

Write:
Alaskan Way Viaduct
and Seawall Replacement Project
c/o Washington State
Department of Transportation
999 Third Ave, Suite 2424
Seattle, WA 98104

Send an e-mail:
viaduct@wsdot.wa.gov

Visit:
[www.wsdot.wa.gov/
projects/viaduct](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/viaduct)

The replacement of the Alaskan Way Viaduct with a tunnel means that the capacity of today's viaduct will be preserved for future generations. Some have asked why this capacity needs to be replaced at all, pointing to the removal of the Embarcadero Freeway in San Francisco as an example of an earthquake-damaged freeway that was not rebuilt. A study, conducted by Parsons Brinckerhoff, comparing the Alaskan Way Viaduct to the Embarcadero Freeway has found that while similar in appearance, there are significant differences between these two roads and their role in the local transportation systems. While removing the Embarcadero Freeway was the right solution for San Francisco, removing the Alaskan Way Viaduct is not the right solution for Seattle and the Puget Sound region.



What was the Embarcadero Freeway?

The Embarcadero Freeway in San Francisco was an elevated freeway segment damaged by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. The Embarcadero ran along the downtown waterfront and distributed traffic to and from I-80 onto downtown streets. Prior to the earthquake, the Embarcadero carried up to 110,000 vehicles daily. Rather than rebuild, the Embarcadero was permanently removed.

How is the Alaskan Way Viaduct different from the Embarcadero Freeway?

The Alaskan Way Viaduct is a major regional highway corridor carrying long-distance trips through downtown. There are few alternate routes for travelers on the viaduct and most of those routes are already operating at or near capacity for much of the day. The Embarcadero was primarily a way for drivers to access the regional highway network from downtown San Francisco. Once the Embarcadero was removed, traffic instead traveled a few blocks further on local streets and connected to I-80 and other freeways at more than a dozen other ramp locations.

Did traffic disappear after the Embarcadero was taken down?

Traffic from the Embarcadero did not disappear once the highway was closed. In fact, traffic from the Embarcadero shifted to more than a dozen parallel streets that serve the same neighborhoods. Traffic volumes on these streets before and after the closure show that an additional 112,000 vehicle trips per day - about the same amount of traffic displaced from the Embarcadero - were added to San Francisco's streets in the area where the Embarcadero was removed.



How did not replacing the Embarcadero affect San Francisco's traffic conditions?

The primary affect of closing the Embarcadero was that traffic destined for I-80 shifted to alternate routes and accessed the regional freeway system using several other ramp connections. San Francisco's dense and consistent grid of city streets provided many alternate connections to I-80, and had sufficient capacity to absorb these traffic diversions. Still, traffic on some city streets increased by as much as 50% following the closure of the Embarcadero, and many have become noticeably more congested.

What effects could be expected if the Alaskan Way Viaduct is dismantled and not replaced?

Not replacing the Alaskan Way Viaduct would sever the busiest, central segment of one of our region's major transportation corridors. According to a study conducted in 2004, trips would divert to the few available parallel routes, with surface Alaskan Way being significantly impacted. An estimated 55,000 or more vehicles

would clog surface Alaskan Way each day, compared to 10,000 vehicles using today. Downtown street traffic would increase by 30% to 50%, causing congestion most of the day and into the evening.

Increased congestion, less direct routes, and longer travel times would not only affect commuters, but also commercial deliveries and industries that rely on the Alaskan Way Viaduct and surface Alaskan Way to provide direct, reliable routes. Increased congestion downtown and on the waterfront would degrade the quality of public spaces in these areas, impact transit, pedestrian and bicycle travel, and decrease mobility to and through the downtown area. In addition, regional and interstate trips would be affected. The already congested I-5 route would be unable to handle the additional traffic, even with billions of dollars in improvements.

Sources:

Memorandum: Applicability to the Alaskan Way Viaduct: Study of lessons learned in the closures of San Francisco's Embarcadero and Central Freeways, 2003
AWV No Replacement Concept Summary Findings, 2004

Americans with Disabilities Act & Title VI information

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Information: Individuals requiring reasonable accommodation of any type may contact Margaret Kucharski at (206) 382-6356 / kucharm@wsdot.wa.gov. Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing may call WA State Telecommunications Relay Service (TTY) at 711. Title VI: WSDOT assures full compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, national origin and sex in

the provision of benefits and services. For language interpretation services please contact WSDOT at (206) 382-5230. It is necessary to speak limited English so that your request can be appropriately responded to. For information on WSDOT's Title VI Program, please contact the Title VI Coordinator at (360) 705-7098.